



**Rachel Carson Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting
November 5, 2015, 3:30p
101 Pivers Island Road, Beaufort**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Town of Beaufort Administration, Lauren Hermley, Charlie Burgess	Yes
Town of Beaufort Police	No
Fort Macon State Park	No
North Carolina Maritime Museum-Beaufort	No
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Perry Barrow	No
Ann Carter	Yes
John Fussell	Yes
Stan Rule	Yes
Robin Newton	No
Dan Rittschof	Yes
Margaret Garner	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Paula Gillikin, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Central Sites Manager	Yes

Reserve-wide update (Paula Gillikin)

- ***Legislative Update***

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources officially became the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on Sept. 18, 2015 when Governor McCrory signed the 2015 Appropriations Act into law (Session Law 2015-241).

The N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve is impacted by two additional sections in the Act. One section involves studying the removal of a portion of the New Inlet Dam at the Zeke's Island Reserve and the other will look at moving the Reserve program from DEQ to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Details for the aforementioned sections are provided below.

- **Cape Fear Estuarine Resource Restoration**

The Cape Fear Estuarine Resource Restoration section [14.6.(h)] considers the removal of a portion of the New Inlet Dam, or “the rocks,” at the Zeke’s Island Reserve, which is part of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR). The General Assembly finds that the dam was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in the late 19th century. It further finds that the southern component of the dam impedes the natural flow of water between the Cape Fear River and Atlantic Ocean and that it is necessary to look at removing this component of the dam in order to reestablish the natural hydrodynamic flow that occurred between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean prior to the dam’s construction. Based on the findings of the General Assembly, DEQ will take the following steps:

- (1) Notify the USACE of the State's intent to study the removal of the southern component of the dam.
- (2) Issue a Request for Information for a firm capable of conducting an analysis of the costs and benefits of removing the southern component of the dam. The analysis will incorporate all necessary State and federal permits and approvals needed to develop and implement a removal plan.
- (3) Request approval from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to adjust the boundary for the Zeke's Island Reserve. This adjustment involves moving the western boundary of Zeke’s Island Reserve 200 feet seaward and removing the area that lies between the current and new boundary from the NCNERR. To compensate for loss of acreage from the boundary adjustment, the State proposes to add equivalent acreage to the northern boundary of Zeke’s Island Reserve from adjacent acreage at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.
- (4) If NOAA approves of the boundary adjustment, the Coastal Resources Commission will amend the Reserve Components Rule (15A NCAC 070 .0105) as further described in the Act.

DEQ will provide a report on its implementation of this section including a copy of the Request for Information and any responses received to the Environmental Review Commission and relevant General Assembly committees no later than April 1, 2016.

DEQ or any state agency cannot proceed with the removal of the dam until the Environmental Review Commission has reviewed the report and a bill providing authorization for the removal becomes law.

- **Study Further Efficiencies in Organization of Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and Department of Environmental Quality**

The 2015 Appropriations Act also transferred many DEQ attractions, including the N.C. Aquariums, State Parks, and Zoo, to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR). The 2015 Appropriations Act calls for a study [14.31.(a-b)] by DNCR in consultation with DEQ and the Wildlife Resources Commission to look at moving additional agencies, divisions, and

programs to DNCR for potential efficiency, cost savings, and alignment of core mission and values. These include:

- (1) Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership.
- (2) Coastal Reserve Program.
- (3) Office of Land and Water Stewardship.
- (4) All or a portion of the Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs.
- (5) Division of Marine Fisheries.
- (6) Wildlife Resources Commission.

By April 1, 2016, DNCR will report the findings of this study to the Senate Appropriations Committee on Natural and Economic Resources, the chairs of the House Appropriations Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources, and the Fiscal Research Division.

- ***Budget***

- The NCNERR received \$594,450 from NOAA for operation of the program during this fiscal year, up \$1,450 from last year.
- The Division of Coastal Management's state appropriations were reduced by nearly \$100,000 this fiscal year as a result of the recurring 2% management flexibility reduction and its share of the \$1 million reduction for the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality required by the General Assembly in the 2015 Appropriations Act. As a result, the appropriations allocated for the Reserve program were reduced by approximately \$12,672.

- ***NCNERR Management Plan Update***

Staff are continuing to write the full draft management plan update for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve. This draft is informed by comments received by the local advisory committees on the strategic plan outline at the Spring committee meetings as well as comments from NOAA. The timeline for the management plan update process has been updated as a result of the writing taking longer than anticipated and receiving additional clarity on the reviews needed. Thus, input will be solicited on the full draft management plan from the LACs this winter. Staff will also be seeking input from the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, N.C. Coastal Resources Commission, and NOAA as part of the process. A 30-day public comment period and three public meetings will be held on the final draft management plan prior to the plan's final publication in 2016, as previously described.

LAC Community Member Appointments

An additional extension request will be submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality to extend terms of Local Advisory Committee members serving in community member seats that expired in December 2014 through December 2016. The request for extension will ensure continuity throughout the NCNERR Management Plan update process. An application and appointment process will be undertaken during the fall of 2016.

Old Business

- Members would like to understand exactly how Reserve boundaries are defined and what could potentially happen to the boundaries with changing environmental conditions (erosion and accretion).

New Business

- Site update
 - Education programs held at the Rachel Carson Reserve from January – October 2016 served 1,709 students, teachers, and general public.
 - Plaques with QR codes linked to educational podcasts were installed on the Town Marsh interpretive trail to enhance visitors' understanding of estuaries, important coastal management topics, and the flora and fauna found on the site.
 - The Carrot Island alternative shoreline demonstration project was planted again with thousands of *Spartina spp.* plants. The vast majority of plants did not survive due to wild horse trampling and grazing, and being located in a relatively high energy wave environment.
 - Members reviewed a list of current permitted research projects that are being carried out on the site.
 - Ongoing stewardship activities include a beached bird survey, International Shorebird Survey, Piping plover breeding survey, marine debris clean-ups, and wild horse monitoring.
 - The study to assess annual human visitation to the site will be continued into the fall of 2016, as all of the scheduled fall 2015 sampling dates were canceled due to weather.
 - Flooding impacts from the October rains were reviewed. The primary impacts were loss of dunes and a sailboat that washed ashore on Town Marsh across from Town Hall.
- Rett Newton, Duke University, gave a presentation on the utility of using Un-manned Aerial Systems (UAS) to monitor natural resources.

Roundtable Discussion

- Dr. Dan Rittschoff suggested using his established georeferenced research stations as benchmarks for UAS surveys of the Bird Shoal and embayment shoreline.
- The Town of Beaufort acknowledged that the Rachel Carson Reserve is a storm barrier for the town and shoreline changes being observed at the site are concerning. Sand eroding from Bulkhead Shoal seems to be moving into the navigation channel.
- The committee discussed harbor and inlet management and the possible effects of these activities on the silting-in of Bulkhead Channel and erosion of Bird Shoal.
- Committee members brainstormed idea of potential members for the Friends of the Reserve board of directors.

Public Comments

- None

Action Items

- Paula will send historical maps to members who requested them.